DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 108 CG 025 969

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Farmer, Helen S. |
| TITLE | Gender Differences in Adolescent Career Exploration. ERIC Digest. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | EDO-CG-95-20 |
| PUB DATE | 30 Jan 95 |
| CONTRACT | RR93002004 |
| NOTE | 4p. |
| PUB TYPE | Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Adolescents; Career Choice; Career Counseling; *Career Exploration; Career Guidance; Career Planning; Decision Making; Developmental Stages; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Methods; School Guidance; *Sex Differences; Test Interpretation |
| IDENTIFIERS | ERIC Digests |

ABSTRACT

Career exploration is a developmental stage identified by career development theorists and occurs typically during adolescents when boys and girls try out various work roles in part time work, volunteer work, or in school/community activities. This digest focuses on gender differences in the role of assessment in the exploration process. Girls have been found typically to explore careers from a narrower set of career options than do boys. This occurs based on occupational sex role socialization. Career education programs and classes in high school have attempted to reduce stereotyping in a variety of ways. The most frequently used measures to aid in career exploration during adolescence are career interest inventories. The National Institute of Education Guidelines for reducing sex bias in interest measurement were followed to a large extent by both interest measurement test developers and publishers in the decade following their publication. However, the continuing evidence that gender differences exist in career interest measurement strongly suggests that such assessment is accompanied with counseling. (JBJ)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 391 108

ERIC DIGEST EDO-CG-95-20

# Gender Differences in Adolescent Career Exploration

by Helen S. Farmer

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG025969

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

1995 EDO-CG-95-20

# Gender Differences in Adolescent Career Exploration

*Helen S. Farmer*

## Overview

Career exploration is a developmental stage identified by career development theorists (Super, 1990) and occurs typically during adolescence when boys and girls try out various work roles in part time work, volunteer work, or in school/community activities. Exploration tasks also include gaining an increasing awareness and understanding of the self, of abilities, interests, values, and needs. Jordaan (1963) indicated that exploration is the first of three substages leading to realistic career choice. Exploratory behavior follows the stage of tentative choice and is a time when a person wants to know as much as possible about themselves and about the world of work in order to make the best choice. This digest focuses on gender differences in the role of assessment in the exploration process. Career assessment texts, such as those of Walsh and Betz (1994) and Walsh and Osipow (1994), contain excellent chapters on gender bias in career assessment. In particular, the Gottfredson chapter in Walsh and Osipow provides extensive suggestions on how assessment may be used to stimulate career exploration that is gender fair.

## Gender Differences in Career Exploration

Girls have been found typically to explore careers from a narrower set of career options than do boys. Gottfredson (1981) demonstrated how this occurs based on occupational sex role socialization. Girls and boys learn early which occupations are suitable for them and which ones are not. There have been concerted efforts on the part of educators, counselors, and the media to reduce occupational sex role stereotypes (Klein, 1985). Career education programs and classes in high school have attempted to reduce stereotyping in a variety of ways, including exposure to a wider variety of work environments, role models in nontraditional occupations, class discussion of issues related to occupational stereotyping and assessment of occupational interests in a gender neutral or sex fair way (Klein,1985). Increases in the participation of women in occupations nontraditional for them have occured since the Educational Equity Act, and Equal Employment Legislation were passed in 1972. For example, women represented less than 1% of engineers in1970, but, in 1990, women represented 17% of employed engineers (National Science Foundation, NSF, 1994). However, women are still seriously underrepresented in the higher paid, higher prestige, and better paying occupations, such as high level managers (i.e., CEO's), medical specialties involving surgery, the physical sciences and technical occupations (NSF, 1994). Occupational sex role socialization is still influencing the career exploration process for girls and boys.

## Gender Differences in Career Interest Assessment

The most frequently used measures to aid in career exploration during adolescence are the career interest inventories. There are basically two kinds of interest measures, those based on empirical occupational scales such as the Strong Interest Inventory (SII), and those based on homogeneous scales such as the Self Directed Search (SDS) and the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey (KOIS). The former reflect the interests of persons currently in an occupation, that is , the status quo, and do not serve to stimulate exploratory behavior as well as the homogeneous scaled inventories, which provide, for each interest, a measure of how similar a person's interests are to a set of items that all assess that interest (for example, artistic interest). The concept of "exploration validity" based on the extent to which an interest inventory stimulates the person to explore career options that might otherwise not be explored is relevant to the gender issues discussed in this digest. Interest inventories were criticized in the 1970's because they typically used sexist language and items that were biased toward men and yielded scores that rarely encouraged girls to explore occupations nontraditional for their gender (Diamond,1975). The National Institute of Education (NIE) issued guidelines for reducing sex bias in interest measurement (Diamond, 1975) and these guidelines were effective in stimulating the publishers of the most frequently used career interest measures to revise their instruments to make them more sex fair (i.e., Strong Interest Inventory(SII), Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer,1994; Kuder Occupational Interest Survey (KOIS), Kuder & Zytowski,1991; and The Self Directed Search(SDS), Holland, Fritzsche, & Powell,1994). Sex bias was defined in the NIE Guidelines (Diamond, 1975) as "any factor that might influence a person to limit--or might cause others to limit--his or her consideration of a career solely on the basis of gender." These guidelines further suggested that administration of an interest inventory be accompanied by an orientation dealing with possible influences from the environment, culture, early socialization, traditional sex role expectations of society, home-versus-career conflict, and the experiences typical of women and men as members of various ethnic and social class groups on men's and women's scores. Such orientation should encourage respondents to examine stereotypic "sets" toward activities and occupations and should help respondents to see that there is virtually no activity or occupation that is exclusively male or female (Diamond,1975, pp. xxvi-xxvii). Interest inventories that extend exploration of occupations beyond those the client has already considered into

fields not typical for their gender would be viewed as responsive to the NIE Guidelines. Which interest inventories in 1994 best meet this exploratory validity criterion?

During the period from the early 1970's to the mid 1980's most interest measures met the criteria set down by the NIE Guidelines to eliminate sexist language, to use the same form of the test for both sexes; to provide scores on all occupational scales for both sexes with an explanation of which norms were used to develop the scale, and to use items that equally reflected the experiences/activities familiar to both sexes.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, career interest inventories such as the Self Directed Search (Holland, et al. 1994) still obtain significantly higher scores for women on Social scales (i.e., those related to people and service oriented occupations) and significantly higher scores for men on Realistic scales (i.e. those related to technical,skilled trades, engineering occupations). Hansen, Collins, Swanson, and Fouad (1993) assessed sex differences in Holland's hexagon ordering of career interests as measured by the SII and found that the distance between interest types was significantly different for men and women when samples were matched for occupation and level. These authors found that women's scores on Investigative and Realistic scales were highly correlated and that the structure of Holland's Hexagon was significantly different for men and women. The SII (Harmon et al., 1994) Manual suggests the use of this inventory to facilitate career exploration for the non-college bound youth, but not for the college bound. Since evidence of gender differences continue to be found for career interest measures it seems imperative to revive the NIE Guidelines orienting women clients to the effects of their socialization on their scores. In the latest version of the SDS the Assessment Booklet gives the following advice to users after they have obtained their SDS scores: "Remember that results are affected by many factors in your background. For example, because society encourages men and women to aspire to different vocations women receive more Social, Artistic and Conventional codes than men, while men receive more Investigative, Realistic and Enterprising codes. Yet we know that almost all jobs can be successfully performed by members of either sex. If your codes differ from your Occupational Daydream codes keep these influences in mind. You may decide to stick with your Daydreams" (Holland,1994, p. 12). It would be interesting to know what kind of SDS scores a person might obtain if they received this message before taking the inventory, consistent with NIE Guidelines.

## Summary

The NIE Guidelines for reducing sex bias in interest measurement (Diamond, 1975) were followed to a large extent by both interest measurement test developers and publishers in the decade following their publication. The concept of "exploration validity", the extent to which an interest inventory stimulates the personto explore career options that might otherwise not be explored has been widely adopted. However, the continuing evidence that gender differences exist in career interest measurement strongly suggests that such assessment is accompanied with counseling. The NIE Guidelines (Diamond, 1975) suggesting that exploration during adolescence should expand beyond the social learning experiences of an individual, and beyond their expressed interests, to include exposure to other career options that sex equity legislation has opened up to women should be followed if career exploration is to become more gender fair.

## References


Diamond, E. (1975). *Issues of sex bias and sex fairness in career interest measurement*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Diamond, E. & Zytowski, D. (1991). *Manual for the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey, DD.* Chicago, IL: Science Research Associates.

Gottfredson, L. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational aspirations (Monograph) *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28,* 545-579.

Hansen, J. I. , Collins, R., Swanson, J., & Fouad, N. (1993). Gender differences in the structure of interests. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 42, 200-211.

Harmon, L., Hansen, J.-I, Borgen, F., & Hammer, A. (1994). *Strong Interest Inventory: Applications and Technical Manual,* Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Holland, J., Fritzsche, B. & Powell, A. (1994) *Technical Manual for the Self-Directed Search, Lutz,* FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

Jordaan, J. (1963). Exploratory behavior: The formation of self and occupational concepts. In D. Super, R. Starishevsky, N. Matlin, & J. Jordaan, (pp 42-78) New York, NY: The College Board.

Klein, S. (1985). *Handbook for achieving sex equity through education.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press

National Science Foundation (1994). *Request for Proposals.* Washington, DC: U.S.Government Printing Office.

Super (1990). A Life-span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown , L. Brooks, & Associates. *Career choice and development* (2nd ed: pp 197-261). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Walsh, B. & Betz, N. (1994). *Tests and Assessment.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Walsh, B. & Osipow, S. (1994). *Advances in Vocational Psychology: Volume 1: The assessment of interests.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.



*Helen S. Farmer, Ph.D., is a Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling Psychology Division, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*



**ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Contract No. RR93002004. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions of the U.S. Department of Education, OERI, or ERIC/CASS.**

For information on other ERIC/CASS products and services, please call toll-free (800) 414-9769 or (910) 334-4114 or fax (910) 334-4116 or write ERIC/CASS, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27412.